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THE RESTORATION OF BELGIUM
AND HER FUTURE

A. J. CARNOY

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THE RESTORATION OF BELGIUM AND HER FUTURE

A. J. CARNOY

The disaster that struck Belgium moved the world not only on account of the revolting injustice done to her but because it ruined a country which before the war was counted among the happiest in the world. In modern times Belgium had revived the prosperity which in the Middle Ages had made her the economic and moral center of Europe. This she owed partly to her location at the cross-road of the traffic between England and the Continent and between the Teutonic world and France with her Mediterranean "Hinterland." Antwerp was the natural harbor for the most active industrial section of the Continent, comprising the districts of the Rhine, of the Moselle, the Belgian coal country of Liège, and Charleroi, the north of France. It was at a relatively short distance from great coal basins and even from the Lorraine iron mines. The plains of Flanders and central Belgium were among the most fertile in the world. The industry and the indefatigable laboring ardor of the inhabitants had been the most decisive factor in its prosperity in our days as well as in the past. There were the textile works of Courtrai, and the laces patiently prepared in the cottages with red roofs and green shutters, or in the humble dwellings of the Beguines, where

everything is white from the curtains and the walls to the serene souls of the maidens.

The clay of the Scheldt was still giving hops for the national beers, bricks for the graceful boroughs and towns with stepped gables, crowded on the banks of the river. The cereals were growing higher than a man's head in the plains of Hesbaye, and with the sugar beets were bringing great wealth every autumn to the thrifty farmers. This rich soil also concealed beds of porphyry and marble, while farther south was the coal belt from the German frontier to the north of France. Around the mines had developed big steel works and workshops for engines alongside of glass works that had no counterpart anywhere, and a zinc industry which realized one-fourth of the production of that metal in the world.

Belgian industry under the impulse of Leopold II had started to expand far outside Belgium, making up by the ability of the engineers and the thrift of the administrators for the advantages enjoyed by other competitors who were supported by much more powerful national assistance. By prosperity we had also restored the artistic activity that had made the glory of the Low Countries in the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries; painting and music were flourishing more than ever; sculpture had just seen an artist of the first rank in the person of Constantin Meunier; a brilliant literature had developed in a quarter of a century both in Flemish and in French. Maeterlinck, the interpreter of the mysteries of nature, and Verhaeren, the poet of modern industrialism, belonged already to the world, while Lemonnier, Rodenbach, Stijn Streuvels, Guido Gezelle, were acquiring ever-growing reputations.

The graceful city halls, the elegant churches inherited from a past of freedom and mysticism, together with the sumptuous and sometimes not uninteresting buildings erected everywhere in the recent period of prosperity, all had contributed to crowd on a very small area much beauty and much wealth, so that an enemy seized with a blind

fury could in a few days inflict the most irreparable loss on that historical ground where democracy was born in Europe.

Although the armistice saved much that probably would have been doomed—it is reported that infernal machines had been placed in the basement of the celebrated Palace of Justice of Brussels—the destruction wrought by the ruthless enemy has been enormous. It has been exerted upon many things that are not visible to a superficial observer, but it has struck Belgian prosperity to its very heart by destroying completely her industries. The losses are due to a small extent only to destruction unavoidable in case of war, such as results from bombardment, fighting in villages, or the blowing up of bridges. The greatest damage has been perpetrated in defiance of international law. It comprises the willful and wanton burning of Louvain, Termonde, Dinant, and many villages, the plundering of innumerable houses, the cutting of the forests of Flanders and Campine and many woods in the Ardennes, and the requisition of all kinds of commodities, notably the wool of the mattresses, copper in all its forms from kettles to lighting fixtures, great quantities of domestic linen, of leather, and of clothing.

Moreover, in execution of a plan skilfully drawn up by a German industrial magnate, Dr. Rathenau,¹ all raw materials as well as the machinery were systematically though gradually commandeered by the invader in the factories of Belgium and northern France.²

According to the report issued by M. Hoover in last December, out of the fifty steel furnaces in Belgium thirty-five or forty have been deliberately destroyed. Many of the textile mills have been put out of commission, especially

¹ Basler Nachrichten, Jan. 5, 1916; Zeitschrift der Oesterreichischen Ingenieur und Architekten Vereines, Apr. 21, 1916.

² The list of those requisitions together with details concerning the Kriegsrohstoffabteilung of Dr. Rathenau is to be found in F. Passelcq's Unemployment in Belgium during the German occupation. London, 1917.

those with modern equipment. The glass industry has suffered less and most of the coal mines have been saved through President Wilson's menace.

In many cases, when the machines were not taken, they were broken to pieces and more than once the agents who performed these destructions made no mystery of the fact that the intention was to make Belgium incapable of recuperation after the war. Such a confession, for instance, was made during the pillaging of the "La Providence" work shops at Charleroi,³ and the German industrial magazine, *Export* (Dec. 28, 1915) states with satisfaction that "after the war Belgian and French competition will no longer exist on account of the destruction wrought by the war." In her plan for the ravaging of Belgian industry, Germany has considered all along the interests of her business men as much as the requirements of the war. The report of the meeting of the "German Economic Commission for Belgium," held in Brussels on June 19, 1915⁴ is very suggestive in this respect. The Union of German Glass-makers, for instance, had taken steps to compass the ruin of the Belgian glass industry⁵ and a similar effort on the part of the manufacturers of cement is related in the *Deutsche Tageszeitung* (May 29, 1917). They have gone so far as to violate the secrets of fabrication, as was the case when Dr. Emil Bronner penetrated into the manufacture of artificial silk at Obourg (Hainault). The flax industry, prosperous in Flanders for centuries, has been wantonly ruined for years, by the burning as firewood of the big vats (hekken) used for the retting and by the removal of copper from the mills.

The depredations in cash have also reached a very impressive amount. Not only the public revenue of Belgium, which should have been spent exclusively for the

³ Informations Belges, no. 446.

⁴ Passelecq, *La Politique Economique de l'Allemagne en Belgique occupée*. Le Havre, 1918.

⁵ *Wirtschaftszeitung der Zentralmächte*, no. 40 (Nov. 10, 1916).

needs of the occupied territory, has been used for the support of German enterprises, such as the Flemish intrigue, but a heavy war contribution has been levied. Amounting at first to \$8,000,000 a month, it was raised to \$12,000,000 in 1917, constituting a yearly charge of \$144,000,000. It was supposed to be destined to the support of the army of occupation, but it considerably exceeded the needs of the *Landstrum* garrisons. Moreover, cities have been heavily fined (Brussels paid \$10,000,000, Antwerp \$10,000,000, Liège \$4,000,000, etc.).

The cruelties of forced labor and of the deportations added to privations have inflicted another damage upon Belgium by deteriorating the working power of the laborers. While this loss, however, cannot be figured out in money, the Belgian Commission for the Estimation of War Damages is reported to have put the amount of material losses resulting from the German occupation of Belgium at \$7,600,000,000.

This shows that the actual destruction of houses, villages, and cities, which would be the feature most striking to any visitor to the devastated areas, is, distressful as it is, only a small part of the damage actually inflicted on the country. Nevertheless, it is one that most urgently demands reparation. Forty-five thousand houses had been destroyed before the offensive in Flanders. More than four billion bricks will be necessary to restore the buildings. It is encouraging to learn that in prevision of that task, important companies have been organized during the period of occupation in order to produce bricks of good quality in large quantities, a desideratum of pre-war Belgium. Such is the society which has acquired a large area of clayish ground at Trazegnies.

Thousands of refugees coming back from England, France, Holland, and elsewhere will find their houses burned down or shelled, and emergency houses will have to be erected, especially for the Yser region and for other battle areas. To hasten and facilitate the building of such

dwellings the "King Albert Fund" was founded in 1917. It has various activities and is making a study of types of houses, labor, the buying and the transportation of materials, and similar problems.⁶

In occupied Belgium also, although little has been actually rebuilt, plans have been made for the restoration of farms and workmen's houses. The "Société royale agricole de l'Est de la Belgique" has organized a prize competition for farms to be built in the Liège region and the "Land Tuinbouw Comiteit" has done the same for the province of Antwerp. The provincial administration of Limburg has elaborated the plan of a large industrial city to be erected all at once on the site of the new coal mines. Full consideration will be given to all the desiderata of modern economists concerning comfort and hygiene.⁷ Sound principles will underlie the plans for rebuilding towns and villages, and special care will be taken in regard to the houses for laborers. Our workmen have given proof of patriotism and endurance during the long period of occupation. They have stubbornly resisted the efforts of Germany to make them work for the enemy, and have yielded only to actual starvation; our labor parties both Christian and Socialistic have constantly refused to join the various pro-peace labor movements favored by Germany. Even in the times of the deportations, in their appeal to all the workmen of the world, they carefully insisted that "whatever our torture may be, we will not have peace without the independence of our country and the triumph of justice."⁸ It is therefore only just that they receive a special consideration in the restoration of the country which so urgently needs their labor to revive the prosperity of former times. Tenements and slum dwellings must become altogether a thing of the past. To this end Belgium will simply have to give a new extension to the

⁶ Informations Belges, no. 243.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 369.

⁸ Appeal of the Belgian Workmen. London, Speaight, 1916.

activity of the "Comités de patronage des maisons ouvrières" created in application of the 1889 Housing Act. These organizations provide capital for building houses to be put at the disposal of workmen, who become their owners after twenty-five years by paying a small mensuality covering rent, reimbursement and insurance. If death occurs before the period is ended, the house becomes the property of the workman's family. The insurance is for that eventuality.⁹

The rebuilding of cities such as Louvain, Termonde and Dinant, and of historical or artistical buildings, presents a very different problem. A controversy has been conducted among our artists on the subject, with the result that only those churches or city halls are to be restored which have preserved their walls, and their traditional appearance. It would be vain to erect anew those that have been razed to the ground, since the new structure could only be a soulless replica like the copy of an old painting. Some cities have made fine plans already. The center of Louvain is to be rebuilt in a manner that will give a more appropriate frame to the admirable city hall which escaped destruction by arson in 1914. The ruins of Ypres and Dinant will be preserved.

Actual reconstruction in cities has been very unimportant up to now. There was mistrust regarding the possible conduct of the Germans in case of a retreat through Belgium, and no desire was shown to accept German combinations for the rebuilding of the houses. In 1915, the Department of Banks of the German Government in Belgium invited the Belgian Banks to allow a credit of \$6,000,000 for reconstruction. The Belgian banks refused to agree to this. In 1916, the Germans provided a sum out of the Belgian budget for loans to those who would rebuild, but on condition that the plans be approved by the German

⁹ Details on that interesting combination and on the housing conditions in Belgium are given in Rowntree's *Land and Labour, lessons from Belgium*, pp. 428ff. The conclusion of the writer is that "the Belgian housing conditions are somewhat better than the British" (p. 459).

commissioners. This condition defeated the plan. Von Bissing, persuaded that the Belgians wanted to preserve their ruins as monuments of the German fury, signed on September 12, 1916, an order that all ruined houses should be razed or rebuilt. Consequently the walls of burned-down houses were torn down to a man's height, so that in Louvain, in Dinant, etc., many streets run between what seem to be two rows of garden walls. A few persons availed themselves of the offered subsidies (about \$600,000 only were granted in this way).¹⁰

More urgent even than the rebuilding of houses is the reconstruction of the means of transportation. The signature of the armistice has prevented the complete destruction of the Belgian railroad system in the east of the country, although in a zone twenty miles in width everything had already been ruined at that moment. Germany has been obliged to return a large quantity of railroad material. The situation therefore is not so bad as was expected, but it is far from satisfactory, since the tracks, stations, and other equipment have often been neglected. Many rails, especially of the light railways, have been sent to the front in France or in Russia. Out of the previous material, Belgium had only preserved nineteen hundred engines out of four thousand five hundred and seventy-two, seventeen hundred passenger cars out of seven thousand nine hundred and ninety, eleven thousand freight cars out of ninety-nine thousand four hundred and thirty-six. These remnants had escaped to France through Flanders in October, 1914, and have been preserved in the garage of Oissel, but part of them were handed over to the Allies, notably to the American Army for the transportation of troops. The Belgian government has already given orders for material and undoubtedly more will follow. Stores of telegraphic poles, rails, sleepers, etc., have been prepared, while seven thousand railroad employees have been waiting, while helping in various war activities in France and in England,

¹⁰ Cf. Stubben's article in *Deutsche Bauzeitung*, Feb. 6, 1918.

for the day when the Belgian government would need them. It will, however, take some time and much financing before the Belgian railroad system recovers its previous splendor.¹¹

But one must not only repair. The present period has opened our eyes to various deficiencies in our transports. The number of canals providing deep transportation should be increased so as to help in the revival of our industries which owed much of their success to a low price of production. Moreover, the prosperity of Antwerp will depend greatly on the extension of the canal system in its *hinterland*. The Brussels ship canal was completed last year. There remains to deepen the canal between Brussels and Charleroi, so as to facilitate the transportation of coal to the harbor. The Campine canals, already crowded, will have to be multiplied for the transportation of the coal recently discovered in that region. The canalization of the Moselle, which is not far from completion, might send to the Rhine and to Rotterdam the products of the Saar district, but the canalization of the Chiers, which is contemplated, would divert the same traffic to the Meuse and in that way to Antwerp.

The prosperity of Antwerp in the future is a question of capital importance for the future of Belgium. The Germans during their occupation endeavored to imbue the Belgians with the fear that the loss of the German commerce would be disastrous to Antwerp. In fact it would be even more disastrous for the Germans, who need that harbor for southern and western Germany, as Cons. Von Grossmann shows in the *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* (May 2, 1918). However, since Antwerp should be in a state to dispense with the German patronage after this war, a start has been given to the building of Belgian craft by the foundation during the war of the "Lloyd Royal Belge" which has built a whole series of ships in the workshops of

¹¹ Belgium has 30.29 miles of regular railroad tracks for 100 sq. m., against 22.38 in Great Britain, 15.72 in Germany, 11.72 in France. The proportion of light railroads was much more striking: 22.8 m. for 100 sq. m. in Belgium against 2.6 in Germany, 1.8 in France.

Whiteinch on the Clyde. The company will soon start a Belgian line from Antwerp to New York. Belgian and English ship owners seem to have agreed upon arrangements to make up for an eventual loss of the German traffic. The importance of the latter to Antwerp, moreover, has been exaggerated. Only one-fifth of the ships entering that harbor before the war were German, while fifty per cent of them were English. It may be that economic agreements with France will be concluded, to increase the share of Northern France in the traffic of Antwerp by doing away with the measures which artificially favor more remote French harbors at the expense of Antwerp. Much, of course, will depend on the extent of the revival of Belgian industry, which provides return freight for the ships, a circumstance that made much for the success of the Antwerp harbor. The exploitation of the recently discovered coal basin in Campine near Antwerp will increase that advantage. It is therefore to be regretted that Germany last year commanded an interruption in the boring of the pits.

Although Belgium is eminently an industrial country, she draws a large proportion of her wealth from agriculture. As is well known, it is of the intensive type, with farms averaging fourteen and a half acres apiece (against sixty-three acres in England), and most of the cultivators are proprietors of their farms. It is natural enough that agriculture has suffered less than the industries during the occupation. Considering the rise in the value of land, it would even seem to have been prosperous. This circumstance, however, is attributable to the high prices paid for farm products and is of a very transitory nature. In the meantime, the soil has been exhausted by the lack of fertilizers. Cattle and especially horses have been reduced to a small proportion of their normal numbers. This is a great loss for Belgian agriculture. An intelligent intervention of the public powers, the efforts of the League of Peasants (Boerenbond), and the teachings of pupils of the agricultural and veterinary schools of Gembloux,

Cureghem, and Louvain had gradually and steadily improved the methods and particularly had introduced the practice of selection in the breeding of cattle and horses, which had given prominence to the native races: the Brabant cows, the big Brabant horses, and the nervous, indefatigable small horses of the Ardennes. Germany has commandeered stallions and bulls with the rest. The only hope of reconstruction lies in the fact that some animals were removed in time to Holland. During years, the Belgians will have to resort to a large extent to congelated imported meat. As an emergency measure for the period of restoration seeds will have to be provided for farmers, who will start the work afresh in the devastated areas. The reclamation for cultivation of the battle fields will be no easy matter. King Albert has recently instituted a prize for the person who indicates the best method to be applied to those fields.¹²

The restoration of industry is a much bigger problem. It is very urgent because Belgium does not produce enough food for her inhabitants and needs to import footstuffs and raw materials. The counterpart to those purchases must be found in the exportation of industrial products. Tools, machines, raw materials, must come quickly and many factories must be hurriedly rebuilt. Large credits will no doubt be granted to Belgium by her allies and it has been very gratifying to us to hear President Wilson, in his speech of December 2, 1918, recommend that the orders of Belgium and northern France be executed before the others.

With a view to centralizing the purchase of machinery and raw materials and of avoiding duplication, overbidding, or disorder, there was recently formed a "National Office for the Restoration of Economic Activity in Belgium." It will act as a representative of the collected Belgian industries and will deal with the producers in foreign countries. This pooling is for the present period. It may, however, be the prelude of a more durable union of

¹² Information Belges, no. 853.

Belgian manufacturers. The question has been debated in occupied Belgium. MM. Trasenster and Ranscelot have published a scheme of "Cartel" of the Belgian metallurgic works.¹³ The chiefs of industry in the Charleroi region are in favor of the plan and propose to exert a pressure on the employers by excluding from the distribution of the raw materials and from the means of transportation those who would remain independent. Most of the industrials in the Liège district are hostile to such an arrangement. Their opinion is that freedom has always contributed to the development of Belgian industry. A middle course will probably prevail.

The future of Belgian industry will to a great extent be dependent upon the decision that will be taken at the peace conference concerning the economic problems of the world. If the system of protective tariffs prevails Belgium hopes to receive an amicable treatment on the part of her allies. In many respects, Belgian products resembled those of Germany (textiles, machines, cement, paper, beer, furniture) and the cost of production was not very different in the two countries. A protective tariff against Germany would therefore favor Belgian exports provided the allies open their doors to our products. If, however, the principle of "equal treatment" should prevail, all barriers against Germany would affect our own industry and kill it. The results of a general free trade system, if the world be ripe for it, are less easy to foresee. A period of transition, however, should be provided during which Germany should be prevented from flooding Belgium and France with her merchandise and thus rendering impossible the restoration of industry in the areas she ravaged with a view to that result. "Dumping" on the part of her big neighbors—especially on the part of Germany—which have large markets in their own lands is another danger to be considered for a small nation, and before the war Belgium was suffering from it.

¹³ Kölnische Zeitung, June 10, 1918, even. ed.

The great hope of Belgium is to find a larger market among the nations that fought and won with her. England and her colonies were the best buyers of Belgian products and there are indications that the relations between Belgium and England will become still better now that so many new bonds unite them. France could do much for us by reducing her prohibitive tariffs against textiles, artificial silk, machines, coal, products of conservatories, etc. A favorable treatment at the hands of the United States at least during the period of restoration is another requisite of Belgium's revival. In return for her courtesy, the United States may hope to build upon an unshakable basis the friendship now existing between them and our small nation and no doubt Belgium will accept with a special willingness America's products such as raw materials of all kinds, ore, tools, bicycles, farming engines, inexpensive motor cars, preserved meat, dried fruits, and foodstuffs of all kinds. In brief, irrespective of the principles that will govern the economic relations between nations in the future, Belgium is in the situation of a convalescent who needs for some time a special treatment to make her recovery possible; i.e., favorable reception for our products in the market of the friendly nations and protection of our industry against the competition that would be deadly to it during the period of recovery. These various questions concerning the revival of Belgian industry and commerce have been considered by two commissions working under the direction of the ministry of economic affairs created on October 12, 1917.

The ministry of finances will have a no less important task in finding the resources immediately needed. The Belgian debt has naturally increased much during the period of the war. Ten million dollars have had to be borrowed every month for the support of the army and of the civilians in the occupied part of the country. The military expenses have reached over \$600,000,000 while \$300,000,000 have been handed over to the Commission for

Relief in Belgium. These sums will be considerably greater at the demobilization of the army and when the situation regarding food will have become normal in Belgium. The part played by the C. R. B. is far from ended. Its activities have just been enlarged so as to embrace the whole share of the United States in the reconstruction programme, comprising all emergency measures, such as distribution of food in the transition period, the providing of seeds, clothing, and materials of all kinds, and the most urgent measures toward the restoration of the means of transportation and of industrial activity.

The German war contributions paid by the provinces and the cities have reached an amount of about half a billion dollars. The money, which was lent by the consortium of Belgian banks, as aforesaid, will have to be repaid by the Belgian government. Large credits also should be placed at the disposal of industrials, bankers, the provinces, and other agencies, for the restoration of economic life. All these expenses and those incurred in the reconstruction of houses and buildings should, of course, be covered by the indemnity which Germany in strict justice owes Belgium, and will no doubt be obliged to pay to her by the treaty of peace. However, until this indemnity is paid in full—and delays are not improbable—it is by means of state loans that Belgium will have to finance the great work of reconstruction.

The powers who will consent to help us in this critical hour will have as a guarantee the good reputation of Belgium for habits of thrift, industry, and honesty, and the skill of our engineers, glassmakers, lacemakers, and other workers, trained for generations in their delicate tasks. Moreover, there is the natural wealth of the soil—though Belgium imports cereals, she exports sugar, vegetables, fruits, etc.—the lime, the marble, the porphyry, and lastly the coal of the Wallonian country. These mines will yield much more in the future because new veins that have been found south of the present exploitations are expected to

have a yearly output of about 5,000,000 tons, while in Campine the Limburg basin in proximity both to the metallurgic works of Liège and the harbor of Antwerp is expected to yield 15,000,000 to 20,000,000 tons a year. (This basin is supposed to contain 8,000,000,000 tons.) This will more than double the Belgian production which at present is 24,000,000 tons a year.

The immense colony of Congo is another asset which is susceptible of great, still hardly suspected, development. During the war the income of the Belgian Congo has been trebled, while the mining district of Katanga has just begun to yield an output. As things are, 40,000 tons of copper had been received from there in the first six months of 1918. The Germans had so valued the potentialities of Congo that they had been intriguing for years in order to have it taken from us¹⁴ on various pretexts, and started a military expedition against it in 1914, which, of course, was completely defeated by the Belgian forces who soon took the offensive against the Germans in East Africa.

Since the Belgians before the war were the least taxed people in Western Europe, it is clear that the nation, although cruelly hit by Germany, is not in desperate financial straits, and the nation who will make loans to Belgium, to be repaid as the German indemnity comes in, will be running only a slight risk indeed. Let us hope, moreover, that the Allies will be able to induce Germany to acquit herself quickly of that restitution which in the eyes of the world will be for her the sole means of discharging herself—as far as money goes—from the crying debt she owes her small, innocent neighbor. Without that indemnity, the revival of Belgian economic life would necessarily be slow and incomplete.

Moreover, the indemnification will have a great moral effect. Belgium would not start her revival with the neces-

¹⁴ The two persons who were most active in a campaign against Congo ten years ago have proved during this war to be working for Germany: Casement and Morel.

sary zest and confidence if she were to remain under the discouraging impression that justice had been denied to her for the revolting treatment she has suffered at the hands of a "nation of prey." Moral forces which have proved so powerful in this great struggle will have a great importance also in the period of restoration and it would be an error to consider the problem of the rebuilding of Belgium only from the point of view of economics. The Belgians have a very keen sense of justice and nothing will more certainly save them from demoralization than the complete realization of their firm hope that justice would finally prevail, a hope which made them stoically accept the numberless vexations and privations of the German regime. Satisfaction, unity, and order will be important factors in the reconstruction period.

If Belgium is to escape the social and political conflicts which threaten to a less or greater extent all the nations in the ten years to come, it will be through a policy of conciliation and wisdom on the part of the various parties. The "Union Sacrée," which since August 2, 1914, has silenced our sharp political strife should be perpetuated at least through the period during which the loyal coöperation of all competent men and of all classes of society will be needed to rebuild the fatherland. It is to be hoped that the party division will cease to be based upon religious questions. Many barriers have been done away with during the years of oppression or exile, sufferings accepted in common and mutual help have enhanced fraternity. The social problems instead of the old quarrels must come to the fore. Since the question of the teaching of religion at school received in 1914 a solution that gives comparative satisfaction to all parties, the problem of education should be considered in a very different light: the development of popular education should take the direction of civic training, of moral and physical hygiene, and of professional teaching.

Our social legislation already quite considerable, should be increased with a few laws and revised in order to introduce more clearness, more unity, and more complete justice. Better housing, better food, higher salaries, better education for the laborers and their children, are ideals to be striven for insofar as the resources of the nation will allow, while one should encourage among the lower classes more self-respect of the kind that exists to so remarkable a degree in the United States. The law prohibiting the sale of liquors, which has just been passed, will contribute to that end. The King in his inaugural address to the Chambers has promised that he will recommend to his government the reform of our suffrage act in order to introduce equality among the voters instead of plural voting. This system was intended to give some advantage not to the rich nor to the landowners but to the intellectuals and to the more settled elements of the population: the aged, the married, the owners of homes. It was not anti-democratic but it was complicated and was suspected by the working classes to be a device to defeat the will of the people. Its suppression will therefore do much to lessen the antagonism between the bourgeoisie and the laborers.

While the social problems in general are likely to be dealt with in a spirit of fraternity, this will be especially true of those connected with the victims of the war. In the crowded districts, the privations have been great and have seriously deteriorated the health of the population. It has been said that there are places where one-third of the people are suffering from some form of tuberculosis. The deportees, the persons exhausted by forced labor, the emaciated prisoners, all those wrecks of the great tempest, have a right to our sympathy and to our help. The wounded and mutilated have even more of a claim upon our attention. The task of reëducating them to the kind of work of which they are still capable has already been started, e.g. in the school of Portvillez, where the results have been so encouraging, that some of our Allies have

adopted these very methods for the reëducation of their own men.¹⁵

In the northern part of the country, real fraternization between the "bourgeois" and both workmen and peasants has been hampered by the obstinacy with which the former cling to the use of French while the great majority of the latter only know Flemish. Under this name is understood one of the many Flemish dialects spoken in Belgium. The literary language corresponding to those "patois" is substantially the same as the language used in Holland under the name of "Dutch." Since 1830, by reaction against Holland, the upper classes of Flanders have more and more discarded the use of that vernacular, and have adopted French to such an extent that most of them are hardly able to use even the local Flemish dialect for more than very simple phrases. In spite of this the literary language of the Flemings survived, thanks to its use in the pulpit, in cheap newspapers, and in popular books, until it was revived as a result of the democratic wave which carried Belgium like the rest of the world. An extensive and interesting literature has developed in the last fifty years and the restoration of linguistic unity in northern Belgium through the adoption by the bourgeoisie of the language of the people has been urgently advocated by the Flemish intellectuals and democratic politicians. Many laws have been passed tending to that result in the domain of administration, education, justice, etc. The creation of a Flemish university was decided when the war broke out. In spite of those legislative attempts at satisfaction, the militant Flemings were not satisfied, because the opposition of the upper classes, and especially of the people of Brussels, was constantly defeating in fact what was granted in principle. The Germans, as is well known, tried to take advantage of that situation to divide the Belgians. They created a

¹⁵ Complete information on this subject of vital importance in the present time is to be found in L. de Paeuw "La Ré-éducation professionnelle des soldats mutilés et estropiés." Paris, Berger-Levrault, 1917.

Flemish university and divided the Belgian administration in two sections. The purpose was too evident to deceive the mistrustful Flemings, who knew that they had everything to lose in associating their fate with that of an empire which was only too well known as an oppressor of small nationalities. They decided to assume a passive attitude. Only a few obscure persons, most of them more or less bribed by Germany, engaged to pursue an active policy and support the reform introduced by the Germans. Those so-called "activists" were the object of the execration of all Belgian patriots both in Flanders and in Wallonia. The adversaries of the Flemish movement have unfortunately tried to turn the hostility against the "activists" into a suspicion against the loyal pro-Flemish leaders. This, of course, has made the Flemings mistrustful and there is at present among them a strong party determined to see to it that, on the occasion of the restoration of Belgium, an end be put to the abnormal, anti-democratic situation in regard to languages in Flanders. King Albert has promised in his speech to the parliament that new legislation will be enacted on the basis of a full equality for the two languages of Belgium. If that spirit prevails, this troublesome problem will be solved by the Belgians to the great benefit of Flanders and of Belgium in general. In contrast to the Polish, Czech, and Rumanian questions, this problem has a social rather than a nationalistic character. It is no less urgent, however, that it receive a solution at this moment, when the organization of a new Europe is about to be undertaken on the basis of full satisfaction to all the aspirations of the various nationalities. The preservation of the Flemish nationality within the Belgian nation, which is the desire of the Flemings who have no griefs against their southern neighbors with whom they have been politically associated for centuries, having the same ideals, the same interests, the same intellectual life, the same social habits, will enable Belgium to play her full share in the concert of small nations that will develop from the war.

The disappearance of foreign government or alien aristocracies all over Europe will give to each racial and linguistic group a chance to develop its own characteristics in art and literature, in social, political, and economic institutions. All forces of the nation will work together for the development of the specific national life of the group, a conception in which the two ideals which have inspired the nations in the nineteenth century will be realized together: nationalism and democracy.

There will certainly be a gain in the number of autonomous centers of culture. As a small nation capable of developing a life of her own, beneficent to mankind, Belgium has given proof of her ability. She will continue to play her part even more freely than before, since she has nobly thrown off the slavish garment of imposed neutrality which has hindered her development in so many ways, both material and moral, and has provided no real guarantee for the country. This declaration was another important statement of the King to his liberated nation on the day of his "joyous entry" into Brussels. The "neutrality status" was not the only injustice imposed upon Belgium by the old school diplomats of 1830. The entrance to the harbor of Antwerp is subjected to restrictions that are unjust and should be removed by a settlement amicable to Holland. Luxemburg was for centuries a portion of Belgium and in 1830 the inhabitants strongly protested against the unjustifiable measure that separated them from the new kingdom and exposed them to the covetousness of the conquerors. The Luxemburg people will decide in full independence whether they will remain a small duchy or associate their fate with a nation that has always treated them as separated brothers. There was a Luxemburg legion in the Belgian army.

The suppression of all unjust obstacles to her national development, and guarantees against the renewal of an aggression against which Belgium found herself almost defenseless on account of her special status, this, together

with the granting of a just indemnity, is the treatment that Belgium expects from the powers assembled in Versailles. Belgium, who has played a prominent part in the Hague congresses, will be one of the most loyal and most enthusiastic members of the society of nations that will tend to protect the world for a great length of time against those unspeakable woes of war which have afflicted so particularly the most pacific nation of the world.

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